Ships off Victoria Fought for Their Lives, But

DURING the GALE, LAUGHTER

This article, and others in the continuing series, have been taken from the Files of The British Colonist, forerunner of today's daily newspaper, founded a century ago. The purpose is to bring to readers something of the atmosphere, events and their impact in old Victoria at the time when James Douglas governed both the colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia and The British Colonist was leading, under direction of its founder and editor, Amor de Cosmos, the fight for reform.

WHAT WAS ONE of the worst gales ever experienced by Victoria—certainly the most devastating up to that time—ripped through shipping in the harbor and on adjacent coasts on Feb. 20, 1860.

In The British Colonist's issue of the following day fears were expressed for the safety of the gallant steamer Pacific, believed close to Race Rocks on the way from San Francisco. But she weathered the gale.

Not so other shipping. The schooner J. L. Thorndyke ran aground near Port Townsend and another schooner, Reporter, struck at Hudson Point, nearby.

The famous Victoria schooner Cadboro clawed her way through the Gulf Islands, desperately fighting to keep off the threatening lee shore as the southwest gale buffeted her. She arrived safely in port.

But the bark Sea Nymph dragged her anchors in James Bay and pounded into the American bark Senator. Both ships were heavily damaged. The Princess Royal and schooner Anna Krell were driven against the wharves in the inner harbor.

So fierce was the gale that the sidewalks of heavy planking along Wharf Street were lifted bodily and capsized into the road.

The British Colonist treated this incident with levity. It seems there was a pedestrian on the sidewalk at the time. He was reported to have "performed some grand and lofty tumbling amusing to witnesses but very distressing to experience . . ."

A small tenement house was overturned and frame-house owners had to brace their homes with whatever timber was available. It wasn't really funny at all, but the man who got most prominence in the report of the gale was the dandy in patent leather shoes who chased his hat up Yates Street.

VICTORIA'S STREETS a century ago were in a disgraceful state of disrepair. They were muddy, pot-holed, rutted and in summer and dry weather great dust wells.

The British Colonist expostulated about the condition of the street in front of the newly-organized Hook and Ladder Company's hall. It was "almost impassible on account of the mud and in case of fire it will be virtually impossible to get the machine ten feet from the door. In consequence of the tenacity with which mud adheres to boots and clothes" it was avoided by pedestrians.

"The authorities should attend to laying planks in the locality as the Hook and Ladder Company has expended all its ready means in procuring apparatus and building the (fire) house.

"The chain gang might be very profitably employed in making the necessary repairs."

However, the planking was not laid, and the chain gang—that hang-dog body of men in the conspicuous striped uniforms, who actually worked in Victoria streets until just before the outbreak of First World War—was not employed as suggested.

Perhaps the government's procrastination in this matter had something to do with the fact that when the hook and ladder crew was called to a fire on Esquimalt road a few days later, the place burned to the ground.

It was an Indian "rancheria," occupied by a number of Songhees families, who lost everything they possessed and barely escaped with their lives. The hook and ladder company eventually arrived, but only in time to see the last of the flaming debris collapse in a shower of sparks while onlookers cheered.

"It was a pretty spectacle," the newspaper observed.

TIMES WERE HARD that winter, and restaurants were generally reducing their prices.

For riding on the sidewalk . . . $20 fine.

Pages of the Past

Ringo's, for example, was offering full board—three big meals a day—at $8 a week. But so precarious was the living of the average citizen that the eating place insisted on cash in advance.

However, there was a steady stream of miners going into the British Columbia diggings and Victoria anticipated a brisk spring and summer trade.

WHETHER IT WAS OFFICIAL or not, The British Colonist announced the result of a census in Victoria late in February of 1860.

"We find the total number of inhabitants"—exclusive of Indians at whose total few would venture to guess but who probably counted from 3,000 to 5,000—"is 2,020. This includes 50 soldiers quartered at Government House, the prisoners in jail and the police force." But the total didn't include the scores of seamen on ships of the inner harbor and the several hundreds of sailors and marines at Esquimalt, belonging to the Royal Navy's squadrons.

The census taker reported one amusing incident. A woman who admitted to possessing three children didn't know her husband's first name. It was either William or Joe; she fancied Joe. As to his age, she was very vague. She "figured" he was "over 12!"

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"ON SATURDAY LAST," said the newspaper, a police auctioneer "disposed of George Hunter Cary's gun for the sum of $20 at public auction. The weapon was sold to satisfy a fine imposed by Mr. Justice Augustus Pemberton on Cary some time since for riding a horse on the sidewalk of Fort Street.

George Hunter Cary was the attorney-general in Governor James 'Douglas' Vancouver Island colonial cabinet.

H. N. PEERS, at this time, announced he had received a shipment of live California quail from a man named E. D. Warbass of San Juan Island—which, incidentally, was still the subject of dispute between Britain and the United States and jointly occupied, with the Americans ashore and the British frowning on them from men-o'-war gunports.

Mr. Peers' object, he added, was "for the stocking of Vancouver Island with this excellent game.

"As the birds have been obtained at considerable trouble and expense Mr. Peers would take it as a particular favor if sportsmen—and others—would refrain from shooting these birds until they shall have made a considerable increase, say two years hence."

To the public-spirited man's request apparently there was appreciative response. The quail were not slaughtered until some years had passed.

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IT MAY GIVE an idea as to the amount of gold coming out of the interior to quote shipping figures from The British Colonist of Feb. 25. But it would give only an idea, because an immense quantity of gold was shipped by other than the official method and much of it, consequently, never evaluated.

McDonald and Company, the first banking house, had shipped $199,815 in the ten months from April 1 to Jan. 31.

Wells, Fargo had shipped $1,289,254 from Aug. 1, 1858, to Jan. 31, 1860, and Freeman & Co. had handled $60,000 up to the end of January.

ROSES are FLOURISHING

For the last two years the display of hybrid tea roses at the Saanichton Experimental Farm has been outstanding, being a decided improvement over immediately preceding seasons. In both 1957 and 1958, blooming period was characterized by two distinct flowering peaks or flushes, the first in June, then a second and equally showy one in September. With the exception of two or three varieties one could hardly wish for better rose performance and mass effect.

Looking back over the notes for clues showing why the seasons 1957 and 1958 were so much better than previous ones, we notice that the improvement coincides with the stepped-up feeding, spraying and watering program initiated two years ago. There may be other reasons as well, but it would appear these are the most important.

In view of the fact that the majority of the bushes were planted in 1952 and before, and are supposedly past their prime, the outstanding results are all the more remarkable. As a matter of interest, the oldest bushes which number 55 in the present planting of 201 plants, were set out as long ago as 1941. They compare very favorably with recent replacements. Much the same can be said of another 19 bushes that date back to 1949 and still another 20 bushes of 1950 vintage. Four years may mark the beginning of decline of a rose in some climes but that would certainly seem to be disproved in this particular case. Not so happy are we, however, when we stop to realize the amount of attention all these roses, young and old, have received. It's almost enough to frighten one from contemplating rose growing! Suppose we have a look at last year's cultural program (the year before was much the same); not forgetting the spring pruning and weekly removal of old blooms. This is how the work shaped up:

Fertilizer applications: (March 20) compost applied, approximately four large forksful per bush, worked in; (March 20 to May 20) one handful of milorganite per bush each date; (July 14) one quarter pound per bush of 6-8-6 fertilizer.

Spray applications: (for insect and disease control) (March 6) ortho bordeaux, 3.2 ounces per gallon of water; (April 30) malathion liquid concentrate, 2 teaspoons, plus tribasic copper sulphate, 4-5 ounce in one gallon of water; (May 21 and Sept. 11) .06 ounce of mildex plus 20 teaspoons diazinon in 10 gallons of water; (June 13, July 3, July 24, Aug. 12, Sept. 2, Sept. 30) 20 teaspoons diazinon in 10 gallons of water.

Irrigation: (May 20, June 6, July 14, Aug. 6 and Aug. 27) one inch of water (5 hours) each date.

We realize, of course, that in all this there's plenty of room for argument. Less care might produce results as pleasing, especially if the bushes were all young. To prove the point would make an interesting experiment.